

ACTIVE OUTDOORS

NEVER-FAIL RAIL TRAILS



Tim Jones

Clearly, many, many of you are as enthusiastic about bicycling (and walking, and in-line skating) on rail trails as I am. In early May, I wrote about several of the trails my girlfriend Marilyn and I have explored on our tandem mountain bike, and several we hope to explore. You responded with a flurry of e-mails about the trails you've ridden, where to find them and why you like them.

I always love to hear from readers (even when they write to tell me I'm an idiot).

In mid-May, Marilyn and I found ourselves in Burlington, Vt., for a long weekend at the Courtyard Marriot, which has a spectacular view across Lake Champlain to the Adirondacks. Burlington is a delightful city with excellent restaurants (try the Bangkok Bistro for superb Thai cuisine). It's also a bike-friendly city, the hub for hundreds of miles of designated bike routes that circle the lake and lead as far afield as Montreal.

Of course we had our tandem bike with us, and I also brought along my mountain bike, just in case Marilyn didn't want to ride as much as I did. This is a strategy I'd highly recommend for any family where there's a disparity in desire and/or physical ability. Marilyn loves to bike, but accuses me of fanaticism. So I'll often blow off excess energy on a solo ride, which leaves me happy with a more relaxed tandem ride with her.

Burlington is home to the 12-mile

Island Line Trail (www.localmotion-vt.org/islandline/index.htm) which winds along the lake shore before shooting out across Malletts Bay on an old causeway that leads almost all the way to South Hero (in the summer, a bike ferry takes you across the gap). We'd ridden it once a couple of years ago on solo bikes, couldn't wait to get back and try it on our tandem.

Frankly, it was even better than we remembered, and we pedaled it twice, once on a cool and windy afternoon, and once in the chill of an early morning. I wish we'd had time to do it again.

But there was another trail calling, the Missisquoi Rail Trail (www.trails-fromrails.com/missisquoi_valley_trail.htm), which runs 26 miles from St. Albans to Richford on the Canadian border. Marilyn pleaded saddle soreness; I rode this one solo. The trail parallels Rte. 105, so Marilyn was able to follow along and meet me at key points, such as the Park Side Grill in Enosburg Falls where we had lunch and the end of the trail in Richmond so I didn't have to pedal back.

From St. Albans to Enosburg Falls, the trail takes mostly a straight shot through classic Vermont farm country. Cows are good company when biking - as long as they stay on their side of the fence.

The stretch from Enosburg Falls to Richford is more scenic; still cruising through farm country with the Missisquoi River on one side and Jay Peak looming in the distance.

All in all, this is a great ride. The smooth surface and gentle slope of this trail makes for easy pedaling, but wind is a factor in this open country, something to keep in mind when you start a ride.

Readers recommend

Several readers wrote to tell me about a rail trail called, variously, the Rockingham Recreational Trail or the Newfields Rail Trail in southern New Hampshire, which extends from



Lake Massabesic near Manchester to Newfields near Great Bay. You can download a PDF with good directions: www.railtrails.org/resources/documents/magazine/07Sum_DE_S_RockinghamRecTrail.pdf. One reader wrote, "It is very easily accessible. Some of the ride is OK at best, especially riding under major highways. However, (some of) it is a nice quiet ride going through woods and around lakes and ponds."

He also clued me in to the Sugar River Trail (www.nhtrails.org/Trails-pages/ATVpages/ATVSugRivMap.html) from Newport to Claremont, N.H. "It is only 10 miles long and some of the stretch is very sandy and difficult to ride. However, there are several covered train bridges along the way which makes it a spectacular ride."

Finally, he wrote of a trail which starts in downtown Wolfeboro, N.H.: "It is a nice, easy trail in a pretty wooded area and goes by Wentworth Lake. The trail past Rte. 109 is brand new and the stone hasn't packed down yet so it is very difficult. However, people tell me that it either is or will be about 12 miles." This is a real find since I couldn't find anything on the Web about it.

Another reader wrote to tell me about a rail trail between Millerton and Wassauc, N.Y. (<http://www.hvrt.org/>). He said, "The trail is beautifully maintained, parking is available at the old train station in Millerton and the scenery is beautiful."

A third reader recommended the Warren County Bikeway (www.ptny.org/newtrailfinder/warrencountyframeset.html) in New York, beginning at the Lake George Battlefield Park and winding to Glens Falls, which "has some nice historic spots if you are into the French and Indian Wars ... The trail does have some steep spots and a good number of sections that traverse the main highways."

A very active senior couple recommended the Pine Creek Rail Trail (www.visittiogapa.com/pinecreek.html) in Pennsylvania and are planning a trip on the Confederation Trail (www.gov.pe.ca/visitorsguide/index.php3?number=1016641) that crosses Prince Edward Island, Canada.

Another reader wrote that Nashua River Rail Trail (www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/northeast/nash.htm), from Ayer to Dunstable at the New Hampshire border, is now 12½ miles long. "On this trail you will see beaver dams, wetlands, pastures and of course, plenty of forest. With a little luck you may also get a glimpse of a beaver, muskrat or fox, and are almost guaranteed a redtail hawk sighting."

A different reader, who explored it immediately after reading about it in this column, wrote, "We had so much fun and can't wait to go back!"

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